

STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

February 19, 2009

In attendance:

State Technical Committee Official Members

AGENCY/GROUP	REPRESENTED BY
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service	Niles Glasgow
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service	Erica Westbrook
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service	Angela Yarborough
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service	Craig Ellis
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service	Eric Fleming
USDA-Farm Service Agency (USDA-FSA)	Kenneth McCaskill
USDA-Farm Service Agency (USDA-FSA)	Linda Floyd
USDA-Rural Development	
Cattleman's Association	
Clemson University	Pat Layton
Corps of Engineers	
EPA	
FSA State Committee	
Grazing Land Coalition	
National Wild Turkey Federation	
SC Association of Conservation Districts (SCACD)	Gregg Henderson
SC Commission for Minority Affairs-Native American Affairs	Mary Hayden
SC Commission for Minority Affairs-Research & Policy Services	Benjamin Washington, Jr.
SC Department of Agriculture (SCDA)	Becky Walton
SC DHEC	
SC Forestry Commission	Scott Phillips
SC Forestry Commission	Russell Hubright
SC Grasslands Coalition	
SC Department of Natural Resource (SCDNR)	Barry Beasley
SC Department of Natural Resource (SCDNR)	Judy Barnes
SC Department of Natural Resource (SCDNR)	Marc Cribb
SC Farm Bureau	
SC Forestry Commission	
SC Grasslands Coalition	James Riley
SC Soybean Board	
SC State University	
SC Wildlife Federation	
SCRWA	Jill Miller
U. S. Environmental Protection Agency	Denise Tennessee
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)	Joe Cockrell
U. S. Geological Survey	
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	
Others:	
Forest Landowner Tree Farm	Walt McPhail
Southeast RCAP	Robert Britts, P.E.

Handouts were distributed.

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. by Niles Glasgow, State Conservationist. He welcomes the committee members and meeting participants. Everyone introduced themselves. Mr. Glasgow updates everyone on the purpose of the State Technical Committee. The State Technical Committee was setup to advise the State Conservationist on how to implement the Farm Bill for the greater good of the state.

You can request to be on the State Technical Committee agenda, along with getting participants input on changes and updates of policies procedures and standards. Mr. Glasgow reminds everyone that their input is valued and needed.

Agenda items were discussed as follows:

1. Program Summary & Updates.....Craig Ellis
(EQIP, WHIP, WRP, GRP, FRPP, CCPI, HFRP & CSEP)

Craig informed the members of the proposed funding for the Farm Bill Conservation Programs. Increased attention given to privately owned farmland. The Farm Bill Conservation funding has increased by nearly \$4Billion. He then proceeded to explain the information, funding, ranking criteria for each program:

A. WRP- (Wetlands Reserve Program)

1. This is a long-term or permanent easement program that provides cost-sharing to producers who agree to restore wetlands on agricultural lands.
2. The acreage cap has been raised to 3.041 million acres through 2012. (That is an increase of 766,200 new acres)
3. The enrollment options are as follows:
 - Permanent easements
 - 30 year easements
 - 30 year contract option for Tribes
4. Restoration of wildlife habitat is a priority.
5. To be eligible you must farm wetland or converted wetland, together with the adjacent land that is functionally dependent on the wetlands.
6. The 2008 rules states that: now eligible land in WRP includes cropland or grassland that was used for agricultural production PRIOR to flooding from the natural overflow of a closed basin lake or pothole, as determined by the Secretary.
7. Changes for easement compensation is as follows:
 - Fair market value (based on value of land, appraisals or market survey)
 - Geographic cap
 - Landowner offer
8. Specifies cost-assistance for maintenance activities

9. Payment schedule is as follows:

- Those less than \$500,000; may provide easement payments in not more than 30 annual payments.
- Those more than \$500,000; may provide easement payments in at least five, but not more than 30 annual payments, except that if the Secretary determines it would further the purpose of the program, then the Secretary may make a lump sum payment.
- The restoration agreement payments may not exceed \$50,000 per year.
- With WRP a landowner must have owned the land for 7 years and units of government are not eligible.
- Craig explains the watershed funds distribution area rate paths. This information includes statewide watersheds and sometimes an appraisal is needed.
- Craig explains the ranking tools.
- If there are protected areas that join the easement there are extra points that are given in ranking.

B. GRP- (Grassland Restoration Program)

1. Has not been funded in past 3 years.
2. Funded for approximately \$350,000.
3. It offers easements and restoration.
4. Rental agreements at 40% with a payment of \$8-9 per acre. SC NRCS would like to do more rental agreements.
5. Easements
6. Historically underserved category has been added.
7. Must follow a grazing management plan.
8. If landowner is under a CRP agreement then they can get extra points for grassland. For example Silvopasture, and or warm season grasses and a mixture of other grasses.

C. EQIP- (Environmental Quality Incentives Program)

1. Funding authorities have increased by \$3.4 billion.
2. The payment limit is over a 6 year period @ \$300,000 per person.
3. More opportunities have been given for the “Beginning” and “Socially Disadvantaged” farmers.
4. There is much focus on forestry management, energy conservation, organic, specialty crop production and air quality practices with this program.
5. 5% of available EQIP funds will be used to assist beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers.
6. SC NRCS obligated \$9.2 million in EQIP funds in FY '08.

D. CSStP- CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP

1. Formerly known as the Conservation Security Program.

2. It supports the ongoing stewardship of private agricultural lands by providing payments for maintaining and enhancing natural resources.
3. There are resource concerns that are identified in a watershed area:
 - 5% of acres made available to beginning and socially disadvantage farmers.
 - Non-industrial, private forest land incidental to ag. operation is eligible, but cannot account for more than 10% of acres enrolled nationally.
 - \$200,000 per entity limitation in a 5 year contract.
 - Animal waste storage is not eligible.
4. 5% of available CStP funds will be used to assist beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers.
5. SC NRCS obligated \$3.2 million in CSP funds in FY '08.

E. WHIP- WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVES PROGRAM

1. This program is used to help develop and improve wildlife habitat primarily on private land.
2. It is limited to private agricultural land, non-industrial private forestland, and tribal lands.
3. There is an annual payment limit of \$50,000. This is close to last years payment limit.
4. Funding is authorized at \$85 million per year.
5. The funding cap for long term agreements have increased from 15% to 25%.
6. The agreements are good for at least 15 years.
7. SC NRCS obligated \$1.4 million in WHIP funds in FY '08.

F. FRPP- FARMLAND PROTECTION PROGRAM

1. Eligibility focuses now on protecting the agricultural use and related conservation values of the land by limiting non-agricultural uses of the land. Forestland is not eligible.
2. The federal cost-share cap is 50% of appraised fair market value of the easement.
3. Cooperating entity share must be at least 25% of purchase price.
4. Two descriptions have been added to FRPP;
 - Underserved
 - Sponsor entity-guaranteed matching fund.
 - Extra points can be given
 - Extra funding possible with the federal matching DOD funding.
5. SC NRCS obligated \$1.3 million in FRPP funds in FY '08.

G. CCPI- COOPERATIVE CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

1. Focuses on technical and financial resources on conservation priorities in watersheds and airsheds of special significance.

2. Funds are awarded to state and local governments and agencies, Indian tribes, and non-governmental organizations that have a history of working with agricultural producers.
3. It is implemented through multi-year agreements, with partners selected through a competitive process and not to exceed 5 years.
4. 6% of EQIP and WHIP funds must be targeted towards this program.

QUESTIONS/ANSWERS/COMMENTS:

- Can these funds be used towards projects such as Indian Creek? Funds can be set aside for the landowners and they can allow funds to be disbursed towards that project.
- Have the watersheds been identified? The watershed teams are explained, a map is disbursed and a website is given.
- The historically underserved, beginning and social disadvantaged farmers will receive a 5% rate of cost share and gender is not a factor.
- The farm bill net conference call-ins are explained.
- **The EQIP program should add livestock, forest & cropland.**
- Craig requests the assistance of the committee concerning resource, organic and specialty crops.
- Under WHIP and EQIP historically underserved farmers will receive 90% costshare funding and 75% for all others.
- A beginning farmer is defined as a, “Member who has been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of the group without regard to their individual qualities.” They must have also been farming for less than 10 years.
- Forestland is defined as land that has existing or is capable of growing trees.
- A TSP must be certified.
- Forest planners must be registered foresters to write a forestry management plan.
- Small farmer ranchers are defined as “Limited to 107 acres and a maximum of \$63,000.00 in family income”.
- In order to receive EQIP funding a landowner must have generated a specific product 2 of the last 5 years of either forestland or non-industrial farmland.
- Beginning and socially disadvantage farmers will be offered 25% above applicable rates (up to 90%) and advance payment options up to 30%.

RESOURCE CONCERNS for STATE RANKING QUESTIONS (EQIP & WHIP):

The resource concerns for the state questions on the EQIP and WHIP ranking tools was discussed. The Committee was asked for items of concern to be developed into questions by NRCS. The items were categorized into groups. There was a grouping for general resource concerns that would apply to those categories competing statewide and as general questions for the other groups.

The specialized groups were; Cropland, Pastureland/Hayland, Forestland, and Wildlifeland. These specialized groups would compete on the watershed basis. The concerns are summarized below by group. Some of the concerns may be included in multiple groups when the ranking tools are developed.

H. GENERAL

1. Does the land included in the application lie within a watershed of an impaired stream according to the 303d list?
2. Is the land being offered in the application within a 319 project area?
3. Does the application include practices that exclude livestock from environmentally sensitive areas?
4. Does the application include practices that include stream restoration and protection?
5. Does the application include practices for buffers and/or field borders?
6. Does the application include practices that address invasive species control?
7. Does the application include practices that benefit threatened / endangered species?
8. Does the application include practices that benefit/protect ephemeral wetlands?
9. Does the applicant have an existing RMS conservation plan?
10. Is the applicant a first time participant?
11. Does the application include practices that address eroded areas?
12. Does the applicant produce culturally sensitive crops, such as heirloom crops, etc.?
13. Has the applicant completed or attended an educational event, such as a field day, workshop, class room course, etc, within the past year?
14. Is the applicant managing their grazing land with the inclusion of native warm season grasses?

I. PASTURELAND/HAYLAND

1. Does the application include practices that address proper water management?
2. Does the application include practices that treat animal waste concerns?
3. Has the applicant attended an educational event concerning pasture/hayland within the past year?

J. CROPLAND

1. Does that application include practices that conserve water?
2. Does the application include practices that sequester carbon?
3. Does the application include practices that provide pollinator habitat?
4. Does the application include practices that benefit soil quality?
5. Has the applicant attended an educational event concerning cropland within the past year?

J. FORESTLAND

1. Does the application include prescribed burning?
2. Is there an existing forest stewardship plan/management plan on the land included in the application?
3. Is the forest being managed for uneven ages?
4. Does the application include practices for Longleaf pine habitat restoration?
5. Is the land in the application a certified Tree Farm?
6. Has the applicant attended an educational event for certified tree farmers within the past year?

K. WILDLIFELAND

1. Does the application include practices for Longleaf pine habitat restoration?
2. Does the application include the planting of warm season native grasses?
3. Is the land in the application being managed or will be established to uneven aged forests?
4. Does the application include practices that benefit federally listed threatened / endangered species?
5. Does the application include practices that control invasive species?
6. Has the applicant attended an educational event within the last year that addresses wildlife?

2. *Fiscal Year 2009 CCRP Performance Goals.....Linda Floyd*

- Question that was put forth to the committee was; “What do we need to do to improve CRP?”
- Every year the goals are updated. This year and last years plan was reviewed.
- The 2009 goals for buffers in SC is 100 acres
- The 2009 goal for wetlands in SC is 10 acres.
- The SAFE practice is funding only one property at this time.
- Allendale, Bamberg and Barnwell counties are involved in the SAFE practice.
- Quails are the targeted species.
- Suggestion to expand the practices to adjoining counties such as Orangeburg, Colleton, Hampton and Dorchester. This addition must be authorized by the State Committee.
- The landowner must have prior farming practices.
- Planting of native warm season grasses.
- Specifications, practices and modifications will be looked into.

3. *Practice Standard Review/Technical Service Providers..... Erica Westbrook*

- NRCS is reviewing and will be updating this information.
- The information will be available through the EFOTG site.
- Please contact us with any comments/questions/additions you would like for us to consider.

- TSP certification:
 - SC has approximately 26 TSPs
 - There is a step by step guide on who, how and why you can or cannot be certified.
 - There is a national qualification approval.
 - Public comment is welcomed.
 - NRCS is invited to the National Forest Commission meeting on May 28, 2009 to inform the members of the TSP requirements.
 - An agency can only be certified per each certified individual.
 - When applications begin to expire a generated letter is produced and the individual must reapply.
 - Bonding insurance is not needed.
 - A state average cost is established for payment to the TSP.

4. 2008 NRCS Farm Bill Conservation Programs Public Net Conferences.....

Erica Westbrook

- Explains what the net conference is about.
- Each net conference can be replayed if you are unable to attend.

5. Other Items.....

- The deadline for program funds to be obligated is usually April 1, but it may be extended until July 1.
- The new Secretary of Agriculture hails from the state of Iowa and holds high the issues including Carbon Sequestration, Energy Use, and Climate.
- There maybe sign ups for EQIP where producers can address their issues.
- National Tech to research, solar panels and fuel usage.
- NRCS is sited to receive \$290 million nationwide from the stimulus package for the watershed programs.
- SC will try to use some of those funds for:
 - Darlington Flood prevention program.
 - Identify and improve watershed structures; that will be brought back up to standards by the SCE.
- Funds of approximately \$50 million per state with sign ups could be available.

Meeting adjourned.

The next meeting date will be delivered by email one month prior to the meeting. The meeting place will continue to be at the following address: Farm Bureau Federation, 724 Knox Abbott Drive, Cayce, South Carolina 29033, unless otherwise informed.

NILES GLASGOW
State Conservationist